

April 9, 1980

Dr. Julius R. Krevans
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S 224
University of California
San Francisco

Dear Julie:

I am writing in response to your request for suggestions of means to salvage the Department of Microbiology and to stimulate intellectual exchange on this campus generally.

(1) Physical requirements for Microbiology. To establish a cohesive department with an intellectual center, it will be necessary to develop a minimum of 8000 square feet of contiguous space for the exclusive use of Microbiology. The renovations must include: construction of a library and small conference room; improved and larger offices for faculty; major laboratory alterations, particularly in newly assigned space; some provision of equipment for new faculty. I strongly favor expansion of existing facilities on the fourth floor of HSE, turning the teaching lab over to research functions, expanding functional lab space to include the present corridors, and reassigning all space currently occupied by other departments on that floor to Microbiology. A plan for renovating the floor along such lines, drawn when possibilities of this sort were aired three or four years ago, is appended. You are acquainted with previous plans, at some point suspended, for reassigning space in part by effecting trades with the Department of Pathology.

(2) Personnel requirements for Microbiology. When Mike Bishop relinquishes his FTE, we will have four and one-half unoccupied positions in this department. I suspect we will be able to fill such positions with outstanding applicants only when a clear commitment has been made to the physical upgrading of our departmental facilities. Ideally, I would like to have most, if not all, of the newly-recruited faculty working on the fourth floor of HSE and involved in research which is technically, if not substantively, closely related.

Obviously the primary problem is the recruitment of a new chairman. In my view, we should be looking first either for someone who is doing basic research which impinges directly upon infectious diseases or for someone who has solid clinical credentials in infectious diseases as well as a commitment to basic research in microbiology. A few people (other than Stan Falkow) in this category might include Clyde Crumpacker, Bob Chanock, or Jack Stevens.

Most of the remaining recruitments should be carried out at junior level. The goal would be to hire at least three new people who use modern molecular techniques to approach problems in immunology, bacteriology, and virology (ideally one in each area). I feel it is extremely important, in view of our small size, that a concerted effort be made to achieve balance in subject but overlap in technical needs, thereby encouraging the development of joint kitchens and other research facilities, as well as intellectual exchange. I would be unalterably opposed to the recruitment of a chairman to be given free rein to make any of these additional appointments.

Since half FTE's are difficult to use, I would urge you to assign another half FTE to our department; alternatively, an arrangement should be made with the Departments of Medicine or Biochemistry to commit a half position for recruitment of someone appealing to our department and the donor.

At least one additional position will be available within the next five years. At that point, it should be possible to assemble a department of reasonable strength and diversity. However, additional positions will require new allocations of space and funds; it is not too early to contemplate their sources.

(3) Suggestions for atmospheric alternations. Even with the projected recruitments, this department will remain relatively small and will continue to be heavily dependent upon the Department of Biochemistry (and others) for intellectual sustenance. In addition, though we should be able to contribute more effectively to graduate education, I have never believed it was realistic for our department to have its own graduate program. I would strongly urge that we attempt to create a graduate program in molecular and cellular biology on this campus which builds upon the now highly successful program in biochemistry and adds appropriate people in microbiology, genetics, neuroscience, anatomy, pharmacology, and other areas. This is an old idea and administratively difficult, but there are signs of its feasibility: for example, Mike Bishop and I participate fully in the graduate program in Biochemistry. Further expansion in this mode, without attempting to rename degree-awarding bodies, could achieve some of the desired effects. However, official definition of a graduate faculty with affinities that supersede antiquated departmental designations would help to foster exchanges of the sorts currently lacking here. For example, members of this program might be required to participate at least yearly in a formal seminar program to acquaint each other with work generally presented only elsewhere. Such a group might make better use of its post doctoral fellows as disseminators of research news, e.g., by arranging a formal seminar series or interdepartmental gatherings for fellows.

As you know, I have been interested in developing the research inclinations of medical students through both the student research fellowships and the Medical Scientist Training Program. However, I think more can be done to encourage medical students outside the MSTP to take a year off for laboratory work.

I believe that the spirit of this place has been appreciably affected by new factors in biological research of the type that most of us do: the entry of private enterprise into academic biological research and the large investments made by organizations such as the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. I think it is critical for you to exercise the power of your office to articulate morally defensible guidelines in response to these changes. In particular, it should be clear that you will not condone the use of university funds and space for work

appropriate to an industrial setting; that financing by outside sources shall not be permitted to violate university or departmental salary scales, influence allocations of university space to investigators, alter criteria for employment, or exempt department members from teaching obligations. I recognize that you are on record about several of these matters, but I can assure you that I am not alone in the belief that more can and must be done to mitigate the divisive and potentially destructive effects of these new elements.

I hope that we can soon get together to discuss specific ways in which we can deal with the foregoing suggestions.

Yours,

Harold E. Varmus, M.D.
Professor of Microbiology
and Immunology

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